Virginia Woolf's Last Essays and Walter J. Ong's Thought

Thomas J. Farrell
Professor Emeritus in Writing Studies
University of Minnesota Duluth
tfarrell@d.umn.edu

Virginia Woolf, a novelist, essayist, book reviewer, and publisher, was a feminist, pacifist, and activist, who also published jeremiads, most notably *A Room of One's Own* (Hogarth P, 1929) and *Three Guineas* (Hogarth P, 1938).

Granted, certain issues that concerned her have changed in Western culture since she wrote those two feminist jeremiads. For example, women have been given the right to vote in Britain and the United States and elsewhere, and young women in Britain and the United States and elsewhere today are allowed to receive a university education.

But in those two feminist jeremiads, she expressed her understandable sense of outrage at certain cultural customs that favored men and disfavored women. In the 1970s, certain American feminists, not just women but also men, were understandably attuned to Woolf's understandable sense of outrage at cultural conditions that favored men over women.

As a result, Woolf's two feminist jeremiads were key parts in the Woolf Revival led by feminist literary scholars. Not surprisingly, Woolf also expressed the spirit of her feminist critique of British and Western cultural conditioning in her novels. In her novels Woolf explores the Dionysian depths of her psyche.

As a novelist, short story writer, essayist, and book reviewer, Woolf was part of a generation of writers around the time of World War I who saw themselves as being in rebellion against certain aspects of Western culture at the time. Their generalized rebellion against their Western cultural conditioning led them to explore the Dionysian depths of their psyches.

Around the time of World War I, C. G. Jung, M.D. (1875-1961), the Swiss psychiatrist and psychological theorist, famously started his dangerous self-experimentation in which he explored the Dionysian depths of his psyche. To process those explorations, Jung wrote out transcriptions of his auditory hallucinations and made paintings of certain scenes from his visual hallucinations.

Dr. Jung's verbal and artistic record of his self-induced visits to the Dionysian depths of his psyche through the use of active imagination can now be seen in the over-sized book titled *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, edited and introduced by Sonu Shamdasani, translated by Mark Kyburz, John Peck, and Sonu Shamdasani (Norton, 2009). A more compact and portable version of this work has been published as *The Red Book: Liber Novus: A Reader's Edition* (Norton, 2009), but it does not include Jung's art works.

In the 1930s, Jung used the term "Dionysian" to characterize the psycho-spiritual process involved in personal psychological individuation.

See Jung's 1,600-page commentary titled *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939 by C. G. Jung*, 2 vols., edited by James L. Jarrett (Princeton UP, 1988; see the index entry on Dionysos/Dionysian for specific page references).

Also see Bernhard Blakenhorn's book *Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Catholic U of America P, 2015).

Now, when Blankenhorn uses the expression "Dionysian mysticism," he is referring to the anonymous medieval author known variously as Dionysius the Areopagite, Denys the Areopagite, and Pseudo-Dionysius, whose writings appeared in the early sixth. The anonymous author is not St. Paul's Athenian convert known as Dionysius the Aeropagite.

Thus Blankenhorn is not referring to the ancient Greek god Dionysius, or to ancient Dionysian spirituality and ritual practices, which Jung explicitly refers to.

Nevertheless, I argue that what Blankenhorn refers to as Dionysian mysticism involves the depths of the human psyche that Jung refers to as Dionysian.

So I see a connection between Blankenhorn's and Jung's use of the term Dionysian. In the present essay, I will explore that happy coincidence in terminology.

Now, like her father, Virginia Woolf was an atheist in the sense that she did not believe in a personal God, as St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas did. But she did believe in a world soul. But belief in a world soul is compatible with Dionysian mysticism, and vice versa.

For a christocentric view of the world soul, see the French Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's posthumously published book *The Human Phenomenon*, translated by Sarah Appleton-Weber (Sussex Academic P, 1999; French orig. ed., 1955).

For Teilhard's version of Dionysian mysticism, see his book *The Divine Milieu*, translated by Sion Cowell (Sussex Academic P, 2004).

But Woolf did not voluntarily induce her breakdowns, as Jung did. But in her breakdowns she hallucinated. Young Virginia Stephen (her maiden name) had her first breakdown after her mother's death in 1895, when Virginia was 13 years old. But Virginia was incapable of mourning her mother's death in a healthy way. In addition, she was incapable of mourning in a healthy way the subsequent deaths of her half-sister (in 1897), her beloved father (in 1904), and her admired older brother (in 1906). Her intense love-hate relationship with her father further complicated her unresolved mourning of his death. No doubt the unresolved mourning that she was carrying in her psyche from the deaths of her mother, her half-sister, her father, and her brother contributed not only to her repeated breakdowns, but also to her explorations of the Dionysian depths of her psyche in her novels.

After the publication of Woolf's novel *The Years* (Hogarth P, 1937), she had appeared on the cover of TIME magazine in 1937. But in the ebb and flow of who's in and who's out in literary

fashions, Woolf fell out of favor in American culture after World War II, thereby setting the stage for the Woolf Revival in the 1970s.

In any event, thanks in large measure to that generation of writers in rebellion that Woolf was part of, it became fashionable after World War II for middle-class white Americans to see themselves as being outsiders in rebellion against certain aspects of Western culture, as Grace Elizabeth Hale shows in her book *How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (Oxford UP, 2011).

In both the main title and the subtitle of the book *The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (Macmillan, 1962), the American Jesuit cultural historian and theorist Walter J. Ong explicitly adverts to the spirit of being an outsider (a barbarian, a fugitive) in rebellion against certain aspects of Western culture. Because Ong himself styles his own essays and studies as being somehow "fugitive" in spirit, we can see him as publishing his own kind of jeremiads, as Woolf did in her two feminist jeremiads mentioned above.

Concerning the American tradition of jeremiads, see Sacvan Bercovitch's book *The American Jeremiad*, 2nd ed. (U of Wisconsin P, 2012; 1st ed., 1978).

Of the three kinds of civic rhetoric that Aristotle discusses in his treatise on *Rhetoric* (deliberative rhetoric, forensic rhetoric, and epideictic rhetoric), jeremiads would be in the category of epideictic rhetoric, as would all forms of literary criticism, including Woolf's. The category of epideictic rhetoric would also include most speeches in American political campaigns and most political editorials and op-ed pieces.

In oral tradition, there is praise and blame poetry. St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of Brother Sun" is an example of praise poetry. But Pope Francis' recent eco-encyclical, in which he mentions St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle," is mostly a jeremiad.

Interestingly, much of Ong's mature work tends to sound like praise poetry in spirit, but in prose of course. But certain examples of the jeremiad spirit can be found in his earlier works. However, he seems to have worked the jeremiad spirit out of his system and then switched to expressing the spirit of praise and celebration.

But do Ong's kind of jeremiads about certain aspects of Western culture have any implications for our understanding of Woolf's two feminist jeremiads and her other publications?

In a similar way, do Woolf's two feminist jeremiads and other publications have any implications for our understanding of Ong's jeremiads about certain aspects of Western culture and his other publications? Surely Ong can be criticized for not discussing her two major feminist jeremiads or her major novels – or her last essays. That much is obvious. But are there perhaps ways in which her work, most notably her last essays, can be connected with Ong's work?

I'd like to explore here Woolf's thoughts in her last essays, "Anon" and "The Reader" in connection with Ong's scholarly publications that are not jeremiads, especially his two most

notable *PMLA* articles "Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style" (1965) and "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction" (1975).

Ong served as MLA president in 1978. In 1979, Brenda R. Silver published Woolf's two essays "Anon" and "The Reader" along with an introduction and commentary in the journal *Twentieth Century Literature* 25, 3/4 (Autumn/Winter, 1979): 356-441. Silver's lengthy article was part of the Woolf Revival that was well underway in the 1970s.

Volume 6 of *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Stuart N. Clarke (Hogarth P, 2011), contains drafts of Woolf's last essays, "Anon" and "The Reader" (580-607). Around the same time that Woolf was writing her posthumously published novel *Between the Acts* (Hogarth P, 1941), she wrote the drafts of those two essays for a projected book that she did not live to complete.

In my estimate, Woolf's "Anon" and "The Reader" are enormously perceptive and penetrating. They should be reprinted in Norton anthologies of British literature – and perhaps elsewhere.

As far as I know, nobody else has discussed the connection between Ong's thought and Woolf's last essays.

In those drafts of essays, Adeline Virginia Stephen Woolf (1882-1941) explicitly discusses oral tradition and the printing press, topics which both Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) and Walter Jackson Ong, S.J. (1912-2003) famously discussed.

In the 1960s, before the Woolf Revival had emerged, McLuhan published his two most widely read book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (U of Toronto P, 1962) and *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (McGraw-Hill, 1964).

In the 1960s, Ong published three books: (1) *The Barbarian Within* (1962), mentioned above, (2) *In the Human Grain: Further Explorations of Contemporary Culture* (Macmillan, 1967), and (3) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Yale UP, 1967), the expanded version of Ong's 1964 Terry Lectures at Yale University.

In the 1970s, when the Woolf Revival was underway, Cornell University Press published Ong's two 300-page collections of studies, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (1971) and *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (1977).

Even though Ong published three-book-length studies and numerous articles after Silver's 1979 article, he did not discuss Woolf's lasts essays, as he almost certainly would have if he had seen them. (McLuhan died in 1980.)

Ong's three book-length studies in the 1980s were (1) *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (Cornell UP, 1981), Ong's 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University, (2) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Methuen, 1982), Ong most widely

known and most widely translated book, and (3) *Hopkins, The Self, and God* (U of Toronto P, 1986), Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

Arguably only Ong himself could have integrated Woolf perceptive insights in her last essays with his own thought. Ong is admittedly a tough act to follow. To date, not many literary scholars have worked with his thought.

Now, in Woolf's two feminist manifestoes, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), she criticizes certain aspects of what Ong ironically describes as male agonistic tendencies.

In his book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967), Ong discusses polemic structures (192-286). The Greek word "polemos" means war, struggle.

However, he subsequently switched his terminology and expressed a preference for discussing agonistic structures in his book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (1981). The Greek word "agon" means contest, struggle.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary in 2012 of Ong's birth, Cornell University Press reissued Ong's three books that had originally been published by Cornell University Press.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In addition to publishing novels and short stories, Woolf published essays and book reviews. In today's parlance, she could be referred to as a public intellectual in England, alongside other prolific public intellectuals there such as G. K. Chesterton. Like Cardinal John Henry Newman, Chesterton famously converted to Roman Catholicism, and so did McLuhan in the spring of 1937 after he had completed his studies in English at Cambridge University.

In the early 1930s, the young Canadian Protestant Marshall McLuhan, equipped with an undergraduate degree and a Master's degree in English from a university in Canada, studied at Cambridge University in England under F. R. Leavis and I. A. Richards in the then-emerging field of English literary studies.

But F. R. Leavis and his wife Queenie Leavis were not exactly impressed with Woolf's writings – either her fiction or her non-fiction. Not surprisingly, Woolf was not herself impressed with the young critics whose works were published in the journal *Scrutiny*, edited by F. R. Leavis and Queenie Leavis.

However, the approach to literary criticism that F. R. Leavis and I. A. Richards favored became known as the New Criticism. But there was no explicitly designated "old criticism" over against which the so-called New Criticism fashioned itself.

But Woolf and G. K. Chesterton, for example, practiced literary criticism, as did others such as T. S. Eliot and E. M. Forster.

But the then-emerging field of English studies got caught up in the then-emerging academic revolution that Christopher Jencks and David Riesman detail in their book *The Academic Revolution* (Doubleday, 1968).

As a result of the large cultural juggernaut of forces at work in the so-called academic revolution, the so-called New Criticism eventually came to dominate English literary studies after World War II – down to the time of my undergraduate education (1962-1966) and a bit beyond that time. I do not recall hearing about or reading about Woolf before the 1970s.

After McLuhan converted to Roman Catholicism in the spring of 1937, he helped bring the approach to English literary studies pioneered by Leavis and Richards to St. Louis University, the Jesuit university in St. Louis, Missouri. McLuhan taught English there from 1937 to 1944, with a leave of absence in 1939-1940 during which he returned to Cambridge University to continue his work on his doctoral dissertation (completed in 1943).

As part of Ong's Jesuit training, he did his graduate studies in English and in philosophy at St. Louis University in the late 1930s and early 1940s, where he took English courses from McLuhan, as did young Maurice B. McNamee, S.J.

After Ong and McNamee had each been ordained a Jesuit priest and had completed his Jesuit training, each returned to teach English at St. Louis University for decades. Each of them taught upper-division English courses title Practical Criticism in honor of Richards' book titled *Practical Criticism* – part of McLuhan's enduring legacy at St. Louis University.

See McNamee's 500-page memoir, *Recollections in Tranquility* (St. Louis UP, 2001).

ONG'S THOUGHT AND WOOLF'S LAST ESSAYS

In the fall semester of 1964, I took Ong's course Practical Criticism: Poetry.

In the spring semester of 1966, I took his course Practical Criticism: Prose.

In the fall semester of 1967, I took a graduate course from him on Studies in English Prose Developments in Academic and Non-Academic Renaissance Style.

Had Woolf's essays "Anon" and "The Reader" been in print at that time, they would have been ideal reading for that course.

In that course I wrote a paper on the two parts of John Lyly's *Euphues* (1578, 1580). At that time I did not know that Woolf portrays a character named Miss Allan in her first novel *The Voyage Out* (Duckworth, 1915) as discussing *Euphues*. Miss Allan is portrayed as working on a short introductory book on the history of English literature, starting with Beowulf.

Ong's 1965 *PMLA* article "Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style" was central to that course. In that article Ong emphasizes the stylized orality that was embodied in the rhetorical tradition of Latin.

Latin was a lingua franca in the Renaissance. As a result, people who were educated in Latin learned the stylized orality of the rhetorical tradition. Then when those same Latin-educated persons spoke and wrote in the vernacular languages of the time, they tended to use stylized orality from Latin in the vernacular languages.

The stylized orality of the rhetorical tradition included what Ong refers to as commonplaces. Simply stated, commonplaces are stock devices. Equipped with an ample supply of them, the rhetorically trained speaker or writer could generate copious verbal expressions.

Because Woolf published two collections of her critical essays in books titled *The Common Reader* (Hogarth P, 1925; 1932), perhaps she was trying to contribute to a new sense of the commonplace tradition – a new sense tailored to the demands of print culture.

In any event, commonplaces emerge from the oral life-world of Anon.

Ong reprinted his 1965 *PMLA* article in his book *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (1971: 23-47).

In the English-speaking world, the stylized orality from Latin enlivens the vernacular prose and poetry of John Lyly, Thomas Nashe, Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, William Shakespeare, and the King James Bible (1611). Lyly, Nashe, Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and Lodge are known collectively as the university wits. At that time, university education was conducted in Latin.

Concerning Shakespeare's use of commonplaces, Ong liked to refer to T. W. Baldwin's two-volume study *William Shakspere's Smalle Latine & Lesse Greeke* (U of Illinois P, 1944). Bur also see Ong's "Typographic Rhapsody: Ravisius Textor, Zwinger, and Shakespeare" in Ong's book *Interfaces of the Word* (1977: 147-188).

Concerning the broader use of commonplaces in European literature, Ong liked to mention E. R. Curtius' book *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton UP, 1953).

Now, Ong discusses the spirit of education in Latin in his 1959 article "Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite." Our human ancestors instituted both male puberty rites and female puberty rites. However, I am not aware of any puberty rites for both boys and girls together.
Ong reprinted his 1959 article in his book *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* (1971: 113-141).

At that time, English women did not receive a university education. However, certain English women such as Queen Elizabeth and Thomas More's daughter learned Latin. As a young woman, Virginia Stephen did not receive a university education, just as young Elizabeth Tudor did not. But young Virginia Stephen studied Latin and Greek with tutors, just as young Elizabeth Tudor did.

In the spirit of turning lemons (no university education) into lemonade, Woolf as an adult writer at times turned her attention to certain writings by women who did not have a university

education. For example, in her brief fragment of an essay "The Reader" she discusses Lady Anne Clifford's diary (599-600).

Woolf herself was a dedicated diarist.

The Diary of Virginia Woolf, edited by Anne Olivier Bell and assisted by Andrew McNellie, was published ib Britain by Hogarth P in five volumes between 1977 and 1984.

Woolf's earlier diary from 1897 to 1909 was not included, but it was subsequently published as *A Passionate Apprentice*, edited by Mitchell A. Leaska (Hogarth P, 1990).

Woolf's autobiographical writings have been gathered together in the book *Moments of Being*, 2nd ed., edited with an introduction and notes by Jeanne Schulkind (Hogarth P, 1985; 1st ed., 1976).

No doubt Woolf's novels contain autobiographical elements, as do most modern novels. Nevertheless, regardless of how much autobiographical material she may incorporate in her novels, they also obviously contain fictional elements that, strictly speaking, are not deliberate attempts at autobiography. On the contrary, they are deliberate attempts to sidestep autobiography. In effect, the deliberate fictional elements are attempts to enter into Anon's realm of impersonal storytelling.

In addition, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Nigel Nicolson with the assistance of Joanne Trautmann, were published by Hogarth Press in six volumes between 1975 and 1980.

Subsequently, additional letters came to light, many of which were also published.

In short, Woolf was a writer, which makes her tribute to Anon all the more impressive. I may be mistaken about this, but I do not detect a note of sentimentality in her essay "Anon." She does not come across as nostalgic for the world of Anon. But she does come across as enormously respectful of the world of Anon.

In "Anon" Woolf is aware of the educational tradition in Latin, but she centers her attention on vernacular English in "Anon" and "The Reader" – and on the impact of the printing press. At one point in "Anon," she characterizes vernacular English as a mother tongue (592).

In contrast, Latin in medieval and Renaissance England could be characterized as a father tongue. It was a lingua franca, but it was not a living language that children would typically learn from their mothers as part of growing uP

In his book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Ong discusses mother tongues and various historical examples of learned second languages that could be characterized as father tongues, but not as mother tongues.

Male puberty rites and female puberty rites were instituted cross-culturally to help boys and girls, respectively, to separate from the world of childhood and move into the adult world. In

terms of common stereotypes, the child's world of childhood is stereotypically thought of as the child's mother-world. By contrast, the adult world is stereotypically thought of as the father-world.

Significantly, as mentioned above, young Virginia Stephen's mother died when she was 13. As a result of her mother's death, Virginia understandably experienced bereavement and had her first breakdown.

Virginia's own personal experience of childhood and the mother-world effectively ended with her mother's death. Unfortunately, she was not capable of mourning her mother's death in a healthy way. As a result, she did not resolve her unresolved mourning of her mother's death until years later when she worked through her unresolved mourning in the process of writing her novel *To the Lighthouse* (Hogarth P,, 1927). See page 81 of the second edition of her autobiographical writings published as *Moments of Being* (1985), mentioned above.

By resolving her unresolved mourning over her mother's death, Woolf was then able to experience the optimal form of the Anima archetype in her psyche.

But Woolf was never able to resolve her unresolved mourning over her father's death. As a result, she was never able to experience the optimal form of what Jung refers to as the Wise Old Man archetype in her psyche.

In theory, a person may experience both the optimal form of the Anima archetype and the optimal form of the Wise Old Man archetype in her or his psyche concurrently.

As I have explained above, Woolf explored the Dionysian depths of her psyche in the process of writing each of her novels, including her posthumously published novel *Between the Acts* (Hogarth P, 1941). At about the same time as she was writing her last novel, she wrote the drafts of her last essays, "Anon" and "The Reader."

Now, if you think that Woolf was just reiterating in those last essays ideas that she had much earlier thought, then you probably would expect that the book in which she planned to publish those essays would contain material similar to the literary essays that she had previously published.

But if you think that Woolf was formulating new thoughts in those last essays that she had never before formulated or expressed, then you might say that she was exploring new Dionysian depths in her psyche – depths that almost certainly involved her memory of her father and her unresolved mourning of his death, which she never successfully resolved.

Jung's extensive discussion of the Wise Old Man archetype can be found in his 1,600-page commentary titled *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939 by* C. G. JUNG, 2 vols., edited by James L. Jarrett (Princeton UP, 1988).

The optimal form of the Wise Old Man archetype involves the psycho-spiritual process that Jung and others refer to as deification.

For Thomas Aquinas' view of deification, see Daria Spezzano's book *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Sapienta P of Ave Maria U, 2015; distributed by Catholic U of America P).

Now, Marshall McLuhan's experimental book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) was relevant to Ong's course that I took in the fall semester of 1967. In it McLuhan discusses Nashe, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Sir Thomas More, and Sir Francis Bacon, among others.

In theory, Woolf's "Anon" and "The Reader" could have been published as chapters in McLuhan's book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). I know, I know, this suggestion may sound like I am carried away in John Lennon's spirit of imagining. But McLuhan was an avid student of literary modernism. Woolf was part of literary modernism. Unfortunately, her last essays were not published until 1979, and McLuhan died in 1980.

McLuhan's 1943 Cambridge University doctoral dissertation centers on Nashe and the history of the verbal arts in formal education in Latin known as grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (or logic). McLuhan's dissertation was posthumously published, unrevised but with an editorial apparatus supplied by W. Terrence Gordon, as *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time* (Gingko P, 2006).

By definition, the rhetorical tradition was oriented toward public speaking, and logic, toward formal deductive reasoning. In short, neither was especially oriented toward personal subjective expression. By contrast, literary modernism in English gravitated toward exploring and expressing personal subjective awareness.

Ong's own massively researched 1954 Harvard University doctoral dissertation in English involves the infrastructures of print culture. It was published, slightly revised, as *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Harvard UP, 1958). It centers on Peter Ramus (1515-1572), the French logician and educational reformer and Protestant martyr whose works in logic dominated the curriculum in Latin at Cambridge University and at Harvard College (founded in 1636).

John Milton studied Ramist logic at Cambridge University. Years later, Milton wrote a Ramist logic textbook in Latin. Ong and Charles J. Ermatinger translated Milton's *Logic* in volume eight of Yale's *Complete Prose of John Milton* (Yale UP, 1982: 139-407), with a magnificent historical introduction by Ong.

Ong's family name is English. For centuries, his family name was spelled "Onge." It is probably related to the English name "Yonge."

Ong's ancestors left East Anglia, where Cambridge University is located, on the same ship that brought Roger Williams to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1931.

Concerning literacy in medieval England before the Gutenberg printing press emerged in the 1450s in Continental Europe, see M. T. Clanchy's landmark book *From Memory to Written Record: England*, 1066-1307 (Harvard UP, 1979).

For a massive classified bibliography of studies of medieval orality and literacy, see Marco Mostert's book *A Bibliography of Works on Medieval Communication* (Brepols, 2012).

Between 1932 and 1940, Cambridge University Press published H. M. Chadwick and Nora K. Chadwick's three-volume study of the growth of literature out of oral tradition, *The Growth of Literature*. But it appears unlikely that Woolf was familiar with the Chadwicks' work. (However, I've not researched whether or not she was familiar with their work.)

For a study of the growth of literature out of oral tradition with more up-to-date understanding of oral tradition, see Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg's book *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford UP, 1966).

In "Anon" and "The Reader," Woolf is undertaking to construct a cultural English literary history from oral tradition to the printing press that is, in effect, her alternative to her father's work on the monumental *Dictionary of National Biography*. But she had an intense love-hate relationship with her long-dead father, to say the least. For this reason, her undertaking was undoubtedly charged with deep personal emotions.

In theory, her undertaking might have enabled her to work through her unresolved mourning of her loss of her father, as the process of writing her novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) had earlier in her life helped her work through her unresolved mourning of the loss of her mother. But resolving unresolved mourning is tricky business, to say the least.

But Woolf's undertaking in her last essays also resonated deeply with her own personal and professional identity as a writer. At least from her teenage years onward, she herself was deeply immersed in print culture as a reader. Of course Ong and McLuhan were also deeply immersed in print culture as readers from at least their teenage years onward, as were all literary scholars of their generation.

Finally, I should note that Woolf, a pacifist, wrote her novel *Between the Acts* (1941) and her essays "Anon" and "The Reader" in the midst of World War II in England. She had earlier lived through World War I. No doubt the stress of World War II contributed to her decision to commit suicide.

IN PRAISE OF WOOLF'S LAST ESSAYS

In the quotations below from Clarke's 2011 volume, I follow the punctuation of his text, unless otherwise noted.

In "Anon" Woolf says, "The voice that broke the silence of the forest [in Britain] was the voice of Anon" (581).

She says, “Anon is sometimes man’ sometimes woman. He is the common voice singing out of doors, He has no house. He lives a roaming life crossing the fields, mounting the hills, lying under the hawthorn to listen to the nightingale. . . . He was a simple singer, lifting a song or a story from other people’s lips, and letting the audience join in the chorus” (581).

See Albert B. Lord’s landmark book *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard UP, 1960) and the translated version of Candi Rureke’s performance of *The Mwindo Epic*, edited and translated by Daniel Biebuyck and Kahombo C. Mateene (U of California P, 1971).

Next, Woolf imagines a more settled time in Britain when settlements included cottages and a manor house and a church. She says that “minstrels came, jugglers, bear leaders, singing their songs at the back door to the farm hands and the maid servants in the uncouth jargon of their native tongue” (582).

I guess that “the uncouth jargon of their native tongue” refers to Old English, the language in which *Beowulf* is written by Anon.

Middle English emerged after the Normans conquered Britain. A dialect of Middle English is the language of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by Anon.

Middle English is also the language of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. But in many ways, Chaucer was still deeply part of the world of Anon.

After the Normans conquered Britain, “Up stairs they spoke French,” says Woolf. “Anon’s words were as uncouth to the master and mistress as to us. Anon singing at the back door was despised. He had no name; he had no place. Yet, even if they felt contempt for the singer, whose body took its souls part in the song, they tolerated him. Even Kings and Queens, the scholars tell us, must have their minstrel. They needed his comment, his buffoonery. They kept him in the house, tolerating him, as we tolerate those who say out loud what we feel, but are too proud to admit. He used the outsider’s privilege to mock the solemn, to comment upon the established” (582).

Outside the church, he “staged his pageant in the churchyard, or later was given a pitch for his drama in the market place. Still he remained nameless, often ribald, obscene” (582).

In Woolf’s day, there were obscenity laws not only in England but also in the United States. As a result, certain books by D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce were involved in famous legal cases involving obscenity laws.

“Yet during the silent centuries before the book was printed his was the only voice that was to be heard in England. Save for Anon singing his song at the back door the English might be a dumb race, a race of merchants, soldiers, priests; who left behind them stone houses, cultivated fields and great churches, but no words. It was Anon who gave voice to the old stories, who incited the peasants when he came to the back door to put off their working clothes and deck themselves in green. He it was who found words for them to sing” (583).

Woolf is on a roll.

“It was the printing press that finally was to kill Anon. But it was the press also that preserved him. When in 1477 Caxton printed the twenty one books of the Morte DArthur he fixed the voice of Anon forever. There we tap the reservoir of common belief that lay deep sunk in the minds of peasants and nobles. There in Malory’s we hear the voice of Anon murmuring still” (583).

In another passage Woolf says that we can still return to the anonymous world beneath our consciousness (584). But this anonymous world beneath our ego-consciousness does not sound like our personal unconscious, but like the collective unconscious that Jung claims is part of the human psyche.

“Caxton’s printing press foretold the end of that anonymous world; It is now written down; fixed; nothing will be added, even if the legend still murmurs on” (584).

“The printing press brought the past into existence. It brought into existence the man who is conscious of the past the man who sees his time, against a back ground; the man who first sees himself and shows himself to us. The first blow has been aimed at Anon when the author’s name is attached to the book. The individual emerges” (584-585).

“For the English past as Harrison saw it, served only to show up the material change – the change that had come over houses, furniture clothing. There is not English literature to show up the change in the mind" (585).

“In order to have ancestors by way of the mind he must cross the channel his ancestors by way of the mind are the Greeks and Romans” (585).

Of course the Greeks and Romans were taught and studied at Cambridge University and Oxford University.

“He turns away from the present. He does not hear Anon singing at the back door; he ignores the actors who were acting their crude dramas in the market place” (585).

“Yet in spite of the printed book, the common people were still at their lewd practices” (585).
“The Elizabethans are silent. There is no little language nothing brief, intimate, colloquial. When they write the rhythm of the bible is in their ears. It makes their speech unfamiliar. It is only expressive of certain emotions” (588).

“Then again we cannot hear the rough English voice that they heard at the back door, the voice of the mummer and the minstrel” (588).

“The writer, who is distinct from the minstrel, whose words are printed in a book with his name to it, must be a poet. For when familiar letters are written in Biblical prose, there is a limit to what can be put into words” (588-589).

“But though at the beginning of the sixteenth century the printing press has given the poet a name, he is still unspecialized. He is not wholly writer, wholly musician or wholly painter. It seems possible that the great English art may be the art of words” (589).

The then-emerging sixteenth-century English poet’s “ear is stimulated by the sound of words spoken aloud. He must make words sonorous, rhythm obvious. Since they are to be read out in company” (589).

“The English sang their songs then, or played them” (589).

“Music moved beneath the words. No grammar bound them tightly together. They could be read aloud; danced to or sung to; but they could not follow the pace of the speaking voice. They could not enter into the private world” (589).

Spenser “was separate from the minstrel; from the chronicler; and from his audience. They no longer joined in the song and added their own verses to the poem. But the book that had given him a separate existence had brought into being a little group of readers” (589).

Spenser “is aware of his art as Chaucer was not, nor Langland, nor Malory” (591).

“Had the poet remained in the great room, proferring his book to the little group of readers, English poetry might have remained book poetry, read aloud; a recollection; a reflection; something heard by the leisured listening in the great room. But there was the other voice; the voice at the back door. Spenser had heard it. He recalled the voice of ‘minstrels making goodly merriment, With wanton bards and rhymers impudent’” (591).

Concerning Spenser, see John Webster’s article “Oral Form and Written Craft in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*” in the journal *Studies in English Literature* 16 (1976): 75-93.

Also see Ong’s “From Epithet to Logic: Miltonic Epic and the closure of Existence” in *Interfaces of the Word* (1977: 189-212).

“The play is still in part the work of the undifferentiated audience, demanding great names, great deeds, simple outlines, and not the single subtlety of one soul” (594).

“But, while we have a measuring rod handy, our past[, and] and a press that at once applies a standard, the Elizabethans had no literature behind them with which to compare the play, and no press to give it speech. To the Elizabethans the expressive power of words after their long inadequacy must have been overwhelming. Surprise must have kept them silent. There at the Globe or at the Rose men and women whose only reading had been the Bible or some old chronicle came out into the light of the present moment. They saw themselves splendidly dressed. They heard themselves saying out loud what they had never said yet. They heard their aspirations, their profanities, their ribaldries spoken for them in poetry. And there was something illicit in their pleasure. The preacher and the magistrate were always denouncing their emotions. That too must have given it intensity” (595-596; bracketed material added by Clarke).

"Bacon's contempt was for hyperbole; not for the art of speech. He was teaching the ranting players to speak slowly, closely, subtly. He was proving that there is another kind of poetry, the poetry of prose. He was bringing the prose of the mind into being. And thus by increasing the range of the poet, by making it possible for him to express more, he was making an end of anonymity" (597).

"Anonymity was a great possession. It gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality. It gave us the ballads; it gave us the songs. It allowed us to know nothing of the writer; and so to concentrate upon his song. Anon had great privileges. He was not responsible. He was not self conscious. He is not self conscious. He can borrow. He can repeat. He can say what every one feels. No one tries to stamp his own name, to discover his own experience, in his work. He keeps at a distance from the present moment. Anon the lyric poet repeats over and over again that flowers fade; that death is the end. He is never tired of celebrating red roses and white breasts. The anonymous playwright has like the singer this nameless vitality, something drawn from the crowd in the penny seats and not yet dead in ourselves. We can still become anonymous and forget something that we have learnt when we read the plays to which no one has troubled to set a name" (597-598).

"But at some point there comes a break when anonymity withdraws" (598).

"There comes a point when the audience is no longer master of the playwright. <The complete figure – the Falstaff, the Hamlet is given completeness by Sh[akespeare] comes into being when the dramatist is separate, & yet is still united by a common life with the audience.> Yet he is not separate from them. A common life still unites them; but there are moments of separation" (598; bracketed material added by me).

"But gradually the audience is mastered by the playwright" (598).

"The curtain rises upon play after play. Each time it rises upon a more detached, a more matured drama. The individual on the stage becomes more and more differentiated" (598).

"The playwright is replaced by the man who writes a book. The audience is replaced by the reader. Anon is dead" (599).

What a fine tribute to Anon and oral tradition! Clearly Woolf had a lot to live for – to revise "Anon" and go on to write the book she had envisioned.

In his book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (*1982), Ong discusses E. M. Forster's distinction of flat characters and round characters. Ong claims that in oral tradition, characters tend to be flat characters. He connects what he styles the inward turn of consciousness with the gradual historical emergence of round characters. Woolf refers to the completeness of Falstaff and Hamlet. They are examples of round characters.

In "The Reader," Woolf draws on the diary of Lady Anne Clifford, mentioned above. It turns out that when Lady Clifford goes to a play, she writes only perfunctory observations in her diary. However, when she reads something such as Chaucer, she comments on what she has read.

“It was when the playhouses were shut presumably that the reader was born. The curious faculty of making houses and countries visible, and men and women and their emotions, from marks on a printed page was undeveloped so long as the play was dominant. The audience at the play house had to draw in the play with their eyes and ears. Without a book of the words they could not deepen and revise the impression left by the play, or ask those questions that are debated now in every newspaper” (600).

“The lack of a reading public accounts for the scarcity of criticism and for the general nature of what criticism there is. Both Sidney and Johnson are writing for the small critical public, and thus deal with general questions, and not particular books and persons” (600).

In Ong’s day, and in his own way, Ong also discussed the history of literary criticism. See, for example, “The Poem as a Closed Field: The Once New Criticism and the Nature of Literature” in his book *Interfaces of the Word* (1977: 213-229).

“The reader then comes into existence some time at the end of the sixteenth” (600).

“As times goes on the reader becomes distinct from the spectator” (600).

“As the habit of reading becomes universal, readers split off into different classes” (600).

“Finally there is the reader who, like Lady Anne Clifford read excellent Chaucer’s book when they are in trouble ‘and a little part of his beauteous spirit infuses itself in me’” (600).

Perhaps we can describe Lady Anne Clifford’s way of reading Chaucer when she is in trouble as a kind of biblio-therapy.

Perhaps such biblio-therapy of certain responsive readers in print culture involves psychodynamics akin to the pity and fear that Aristotle describes at least certain responsive audience members at ancient Greek plays experiencing.

“And the curious faculty – the power to make places and houses, men and women and their thoughts and emotions visible on the printed page is always changing. The cinema is now developing his eyes; the Broadcast is developing his ear. His importance can be gauged by the fact that when his attention is distracted, in times of public crisis, the writer exclaims: I can write no more” (600-601).

In effect, Woolf exclaimed that she could write no more and decided to commit suicide.

“But the presence of the reader was felt even while the play was still on the stage. It was for him that Burton composed that extraordinary composition the Anatomy of Melancholy. It is there that the reader makes his first appearance, for it is there that we find the writer completely conscious of his relation with the reader” (601).

See Ong's 1975 *PMLA* article "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," which he reprinted, slightly revised, in his book *Interfaces of the Word* (1977: 53-81).

Back to Burton.

"There is no playhouse forcing him to embody his meditations" (601).

"We are at a remove from the thing being treated. We are enjoying the spectacle of melancholy, not sharing its anguish" (601).

No doubt Woolf has experienced the anguish of melancholy, at least as early as her experience of bereavement after her mother's death when she was 13.

No doubt the Victorian Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) experienced melancholy and expressed his experiences in certain sonnets that literary critics refer to as the "terrible sonnets" because he shares the anguish of his melancholy in them.

For a perceptive discussion of Hopkins' so-called "terrible sonnets," see Ong's book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986).

"It is here than that we develop faculties that the play left dormant. Now the reader is completely in being. He can pause; he can draw back from the page and see behind it a man sitting alone in the centre of the labyrinth of words in a college room thinking of suicide. He can gratify many different moods. He can read directly what is on the page, or, drawing aside, can read what is not written. There is a long drawn continuity in the book that the play has not. It gives a different pace to the mind. We are in a world where nothing is concluded" (601).

Even so, this is where the draft of "The Reader" breaks off.

Woolf's suicide fills me with sadness.

Unlike Woolf, George Orwell was not a pacifist. He lived long enough to see President Harry Truman drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. George Orwell vividly expressed the enormity of those atomic bombs in his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948).

Long before those atomic bombs were dropped, the enormity of World War II registered deeply on Woolf.

No doubt we in Western culture today are still living in the shadow of World War I and World War II and the Cold War.